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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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***Rural Fire Department Equipment Priority Act Introduced  
Carson is Original Co-sponsor of Bipartisan Legislation to  
Assist Rural Firefighters***

Washington, D.C. --

Second District Congressman Brad Carson (D-OK) announced today that H.R. 5421, The Rural Fire Department Equipment Priority Act of 2002, has been introduced. Congressman Carson is the only member of the Oklahoma Congressional Delegation to co-sponsor this legislation.

"The Rural Fire Department Equipment Priority Act will direct the Secretary of Defense to provide the U.S. Forest Service with excess property for the benefit of rural and volunteer fire departments," Congressman Carson said. "This legislation is critical in guaranteeing the departments most in need are able to obtain the necessary equipment to perform their duties. Currently, volunteer and rural fire departments are given low priority for the allocation of this equipment, and the legislation we introduced would make assisting these departments top priority."

The U.S. Forest Service, an agency under the U.S. Department of Agriculture, administers the Federal Excess Personal Property program (FEPP). The FEPP makes available to fire departments used equipment and vehicles that are no longer needed by the federal government. Under current law, the Defense Department has considerable discretion in discarding excess property, and the FEPP is only one option. If enacted, this legislation would require the Defense Secretary to provide priority to donating property to the FEPP program.

"I have worked very closely with rural and volunteer fire departments across eastern Oklahoma," Congressman Carson said, "and it is painfully obvious these departments are in need of additional vehicles and equipment. I have seen too many fire departments having to rely on forty or fifty year old vehicles as their primary tanker and pumper. This situation puts the firefighters, property, and lives in a dire situation if the vehicle breaks down. This legislation provides an increased opportunity for rural and volunteer fire departments to obtain new and reliable equipment."

The Rural Fire Department Equipment Priority Act was authored by Congressman Mike Ross (D-Arkansas) and has 29 bipartisan co-sponsors. The National Association of State Foresters and the National Volunteer Fire Council has endorsed the legislation.

“When the rural fire coordinators in my Congressional District, Ernie Ledbetter of EODD, Melvin Mashburn of Grand Gateway, and Dale Block of INCOG, told me of the positive impact this legislation would have on rural fire departments, I did not hesitate to lend my support for this bill.”

Congressman Brad Carson has strongly championed legislation and programs that assist rural and volunteer fire departments. In addition to HR. 5421, he is a co-sponsor of HR 1919, the Good Samaritan Volunteer Firefighter Assistance Act of 2001. That bill would provide volunteer fire departments greater access and ability to obtain donated equipment from career departments. Congressman Carson also strongly supports the FEMA Assistance to Firefighters Grant program. To date, FEMA has made thirty awards in the second district to fire departments totaling over \$1 million in grants.

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